
THE PRACTICE AND IMPACT OF DIVINE HEALING IN SAINT JOHN APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Previous works on Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission have focused on the establishment of the church by its female founder, Christina Nku. Other works have studied the reasons that caused the church to undergo several schisms over the years. Some scholars have discussed Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission as a Pentecostal church instead of an African Independent Church. This article looks at the practice of divine healing in Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission and its impact on the growth of the church, by using a missiological lens. This shall be established by looking at the practice of divine healing in the African Independent Churches in general. The practice of divine healing in Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission shall be explored by looking at the role of the Holy Spirit, healing symbols and healing songs. The article also looks at the relationship between divine healing and western medicine. The purpose here is to demonstrate the impact of divine healing on the growth of Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission.

Key Words: Divine Healing; African Independent Churches; St John Apostolic Faith Mission; Healing Symbols; Western Medicine

Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission as an African Independent Church

African Independent Churches (AIC)¹ refers to churches that present Christianity in an African context and relevant to African people. Munthali, Mannan, MacLachlan, and Swartz state that during the 19th century AICs emerged, which syncretised traditional African religion with European Christianity.² Togarasei, Mmolai and Nkomazana find reasons for this syncretisation to include the denominational divisions and failure of the mother churches to meet local needs; the desire for physical healing; the desire for community, that is, identity, belonging and harmony; a response of protest against white domination and a desire for liberation; a response to western cultural systems.³ Van den Bosch-Heij asserts that AICs were “founded and are run by Africans, who succeed in making the message of the Gospel relevant to the African indigenous worldview. The AIC movement is often perceived as an authentic African expression of Christianity, because the AICs created space for certain spiritual or pneumatic elements that are of great importance

¹ Depending on one's perspective, the acronym AIC can also stand for African Indigenous Churches, African Independent Churches or African Initiated Churches. In this article the acronym AIC refers to African Independent Churches.

² Munthali, Alister C, Hasheem Mannan, Malcolm MacLachlan & Leslie Swartz. “Seeking Biomedical and Traditional Treatment is a Spiritual Lapse among Zionists: A Case Study of the Zion Church in Malawi.” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 39, 2026, no. 2:140.

³ Togarasei, Lovemore, S Mmolai, and Fidelis Nkomazana. “The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana: Responses and Challenges.” *Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing*, 2011:14.

within the African context but that were not allowed to exist within the missionary-founded churches".⁴

As stated by Pirirani the AICs "believe in spirituality, prophecy, spiritual healing, relying on the Holy Spirit rather than human intellect. Although the prophecies came from a human being, they still believe it is through the Spirit's guidance. There are certain beliefs and practises which make AICs distinctive. Prominent among them are revelation through the prophets, second is faith healing and AICs are more ritualistic than any other churches".⁵ Stuart opines that "within the context of community, the AICs spoke to the practical needs of the people".⁶

Adongo illustrates that AICs "have been a widespread and fascinating phenomenon. AICs have attracted numerous observers and analysts over the years. They represent one of the most profound developments in the transmission and transformation of both African Christianity and Christianity in Africa".⁷ In addition AICs in South Africa they may well represent the majority of the population today, especially those on the margins of society. In the words of Öhlmann and Gräb "they have an important role in shaping the attitudes, values and ethics of their membership. Numerous studies have shown that AICs in South Africa bear a high degree of transformative potential, which is 'the capacity to legitimise, in religious or ideological terms, the development of new motivations, activities, and institutions'.⁸ Ositelu says that "In spite of the interpretation that the Western world give to the AICs, most of them are stable, growing churches with a Christian doctrine based on the Bible as sole authority, a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, faith in the God of the Bible and confidence in its promises. One can say with conviction that AICs are part of the universal church and have much to contribute to her life".⁹

The Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission, as reported by Molobi, is regarded specifically as an African indigenous church and a family of the AICs. Some theological opinions and observations are that Pentecostal-type AICs overemphasised pneumatology as the Africa spiritual world, particularly the ancestor cult, which formed new expressions.¹⁰ This church also has its roots in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of South Africa.¹¹ One of the major distinguishing features of this church is that it was founded by a woman, Christina Nku in 1939 at Evaton outside Johannesburg. Kruss states that "a group of people who had been healed by prayer started gathering at her two-roomed house in Prospect Township, Johannesburg. Thus the Church was started that was later recognised and registered in South Africa as St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission. It was named after my first son,

⁴ Deborah van den Bosch-Heij. *Spirit and Healing in Africa: A Reformed Pneumatological Perspective*. African Sun Media, 2013:122. City of publisher?

⁵ Richard, Pirirani. *Mt Darwin AICs: Continuity or Discontinuity with Biblical Pre-Canonical Prophets*, 2015:11.

⁶ Donald Stuart. *I came that They may have Life, and have it Abundantly*. Middlebury College, 2008:15.

⁷ Wilson, O Adongo. *The History, Beliefs and Practices of the Voice of Salvation and Healing Church*, 1954-2012. Kenyatta University, 2015:1.

⁸ Philipp, Marie-Luise Frost, Öhlmann and Wilhelm Gräb. "African Initiated Churches' potential as Development Actors." *HTS Theological Studies* 72, no. 4, 2016:1-12.

⁹ Rufus, Okikiolaolu, Olubiye, Ositelu. *African Instituted Churches: Diversities, Growth, Gifts, Spirituality and Ecumenical Understanding of African Initiated Churches*. Vol. 18. LIT Verlag Münster, 2002:61.

¹⁰ Masilo, Molobi. "The Historical Voices of the African Independent Churches: Towards New Development". *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 2013, 39:155-167.

¹¹ AFM is a Pentecostal Church started by an American missionary, John G Lake.

John".¹² She had visions since her youth. She was also part of Le Roux¹³'s church. She was also coming from the Zion Apostolic Church background and the affiliation of AFM. In the words of Modiko "Her continued prophetic disorder in the church caused her expulsion as Le Roux could not tolerate her prophetic raptures. She also prayed for water that was said to heal all sorts of ailments".¹⁴

The church has had a protracted history of conflict and schisms. Masondo says that "at the core of the conflict and schisms were contestations over leadership and control of the church and its resources".¹⁵ One good example of bringing the church into disarray, Molobi asserts, "was the Saint Paul Apostolic Faith Mission Church of Archbishop Masango in the East Rand. This church seceded from the Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission of Manku in the 1980s. The same churches are still splitting into further splinter groups today as a result of misunderstandings and conflicts that erupt frequently in them. It is the power struggle by some of the leaders who may want to gun for positions in the church".¹⁶

Healing Symbolic Objects in St John Apostolic Faith Mission

St John members, like most members of AICs, believe in healing by the use of symbolic objects. The mediation of divine healing power and the support of the social environment are demonstrated in healing rituals. These rituals belong to the community. Essentially they are only meaningful within a particular network of relationships because they are performed in reference to a particular community. Furthermore, healing rituals are manifestations of the restoration of the individual's deficient relationship(s), and of the transformation of the community itself. In that sense, healing as well as its display can be seen as a service of the community.¹⁷

Some researchers like Schlemmer contend that "the healing rituals are a means whereby their social realities are reinvented".¹⁸ However, Thomas maintains that essentially, in the South African context and elsewhere, ritual healing is the enactment of people's beliefs. As a religious act, healing ritual is the drama human beings perform to build a relationship between themselves and their beliefs. Ritual expression at St. John's was usually associated with moral problems, social conflict and the healing of illness. Ritual was a means by which St. John's members came to terms with that which was out of order. Thus, it was a means to bind the community, resolve conflict, and ultimately improve health and the quality of life.¹⁹

Water as a symbolic object has always played an important role in all nations especially in African life. Modiko opines that Africans understand that water comes from 'heaven' and has an important spiritual content. When a spell is pronounced over the water the life-

¹² Glenda, Kruss. *Religion, Class and Culture: Indigenous Churches in South Africa, with special Reference to Zionist-Apostolics*. University of Cape Town, 1985:166.

¹³ Le Roux is the Second President of the AFM of South Africa

¹⁴ Buti, Vincent, Modiko. *The Concept of Healing Power in the African Initiated Churches (AICs) with special Reference to the Vaal Triangle*. North-West University, 2011:232.

¹⁵ Sibusiso, Masondo. *Prophets never die? The Story of Bishop PJ Masango of the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission*. 2015:232.

¹⁶ Masilo, Molobi. *Power Struggles, Poverty and Breakaways in the African Independent Churches in South Africa*. 2011:11.

¹⁷ Bosch-Heij, Spirit and healing in Africa, 64.

¹⁸ Lawrence Schlemmer. *Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and its Potential Social and Economic Role*. Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2008:25.

¹⁹ Linda E Thomas, "African Indigenous Churches as a Source of Socio-political Transformation in South Africa." *Africa Today* 41, 1994 no. 1:39-56.

giving force of water is activated. In healing practices, including exorcism, water plays a dominant role. The major emphasis is on purification; the water cleanses, it is an expellant. "Purification belongs to the consciousness of the religious person who is disturbed or whose position in relation to the community has become disturbed and who wishes to have this restored".²⁰ In St John, Landman says "Nku blessed the bottles of water, this water acquired healing powers. Nku expanded her healing ministry with love towards other people and the advocacy of a healthy moral lifestyle".²¹ Consequently, Masondo opines that "Her church was a place for those who are ill and no one goes there willingly but through a special calling. Healing, through the use of holy water, was central to the theology and practice of the church".²²

At the close of the service at St John, people brought plastic containers with water to be prayed for by the minister. The water came from the municipal supply, but after it had been prayed for it was believed to have curative properties. The minister covered the water with a linen cloth and then drew a circle around it with his gold staff, after which the cloth was removed and the water given back to the people to sprinkle and drink for the healing of their sicknesses. Then the minister called forward those who were joining the church, and those who were candidates for baptism. They were liberally sprinkled with water on their faces and on their backs, after which the ministers laid hands on them. The congregation knelt in prayer to close what had been a four-hour service.²³

Kunnie maintains that Nku adopted the use of water, among other natural resources, to facilitate the completion of respective procedures and processes such as baptism and cleansing. One of the reasons for the use of water in the church is that it was and continues to be regarded as sacred in the apostolic tradition. Nku also used water to facilitate the completion of divine healing.²⁴ Lebeloane and Madise opine that:

"The purpose of going into and using these sources was mainly to wash themselves in water in the belief that their wounds would be healed, pains eased and so forth. During those times, diseases were thought to be a sign of divine wrath. Washing and bathing in sacred waters was seen as serving a dual function, namely that of serving a rite of placating the gods and as a means of healing and curing the body".²⁵

Furthermore the holy water is used as a protective medicine either by drinking or bathing. To protect a house against witches, the holy water is sprinkled into all four corners in a room.²⁶ The characteristic uniform of the St John's was blue and white. Mother Nku, who is the initiator and first leader of this church, had chosen these colours because they were shown to her in a vision. Due to this they were believed to have sacred healing powers.²⁷

²⁰ Modiko, *The Concept of Healing Power*, 14.

²¹ Christina Landman, "Christina Nku and St John's: A Hundred Years later." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 32, 2006 no. 1:1-32.

²² Sibusiso, Masondo, "The Crisis Model for Managing Change in African Christianity: The Story of St John's Apostolic Church." *Exchange* 42, 2013 no. 2:157-174.

²³ Allan, Anderson and Samuel Otwang. *TUMELO: The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1993:48.

²⁴ Julian Kunnie, *Indigenous African Churches and Religio-Cultural Liberation: The Practice of Traditional Healing*, 1992:23.

²⁵ Lazarus Lebeloane, and Madise Mokhele. "The Use of Different Types of Water in the Zion Christian Church." (2006). *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 32(2):143-152.

²⁶ Kateřina. Mildnerová, "African Independent Churches in Zambia (Lusaka)". *Ethnologia Actualis* 14, 2014, no. 2:8-25.

²⁷ Jacqueline Martha Francisca Wouters, "An Anthropological Study of Healing Practices in African Initiated Churches with Specific Reference to a Zionist Christian Church in Marabastad". 2014:10

Women have to cover their hair during worship, in keeping with the inspired counsel of God through St. Paul the Apostle (1 Cor. 11:1-10). The Church believes in the adult baptism by immersion because only an adult can make a confession or profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ²⁸.

Healing and Holy Spirit in St John Apostolic Faith Mission

There are two central constructs in St. John's world view, namely, the role of the Holy Spirit (umoya) and the service of healing. These constructs give a view of the way in which members responded to supernatural entities and how association with the spirit world ultimately augmented members' participation in socio-political acts. The Holy Spirit was the means through which the work of healing took place at St. John's. It provided a spiritual and communal bond among St. John's members. Indeed, the church and all aspects of its life were empowered through umoya. Umoya as a spiritual power usually took possession of persons during worship services.²⁹

In addition the evil spirit had to be exorcised. While this was done by the diviner under the guidance of an ancestor spirit(s) in African Traditional religion, the prophet calls for assistance from 'the Spirit'/Holy Spirit and/or messenger(s) in AICs. The Spirit (*uMoya*) is a 'personalised force' from two sources, two realities: the African understanding of life and the Biblical revelation³⁰. In my opinion, the Holy Spirit is the centre of power for healing in St John and other AICs, the same way it was recorded earlier in the book of Acts.

Healing through the power of the Holy Spirit (and by means of prayers, spiritual blessings, laying on of hands on patients, demon exorcism or speaking in tongues) is not a unique practice in St John but common among the AICs. The belief that the Holy Spirit dwells in a believer, thereby removing the presence of undesirable spirits in an individual, is the core of spiritual healing. It is believed that only a body rid of bad spirits can receive the Holy Spirit, and thus be healed. For this reason a spirit possession in the form of trance is provoked both on the side of patients and prophets during the healing sessions in these churches. One of the greatest attractions of the AICs is that they accept the ontological reality of witchcraft and evil spirits and offer protection from it.³¹ Thus the Holy Spirit is viewed as an antidote to the manifestations of the evil spirits. Believers need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to fight and conquer evil spirits.

Moreover, within the African church-based healing discourse, the meaning of the power of the Spirit is understood in such a way that the Spirit is not only needed for dismantling the effects of evil, but also for revealing the cause of illness and misfortune. The Holy Spirit moves beyond the treatment of symptoms, and reaches deeper, uprooting the source of the ailment. The power of the Spirit is a crucial theme within the church-based healing discourse, because *the power of the Spirit is key to a new perspective on experienced reality*. The outlook on life in abundance will remain blurred if the power of the Spirit is out of the picture, since the Spirit is needed in order to discern, identify and address evil³². When the evil spirit causing the sickness is identified, the Holy Spirit will further direct the prophet on how to lead a sick person into complete divine healing.

²⁸ Ositelu, African Instituted Churches, 192.

²⁹ Thomas, African Indigenous Churches, 45

³⁰ Modiko, The Concept of Healing Power, 26.

³¹ Mildnerová, African Independent Churches in Zambia, 10.

³² Van den Bosch-Heij, Deborah. Spirit and Healing in Africa, 140.

The Holy Spirit acting through the prophet could identify the afflicting spirit; determine the source of the problem, often using local spirit terms; and then begin to drive the spirit out, a process that can take days to achieve. In obvious contrast to traditional healing, church pastors and prophets insist that an offending/evil spirit can only be driven out by the Holy Spirit if the help-seeker becomes a member of the church and conforms to Christian life accordingly.³³ The renewal of the Holy Spirit in the words of Ositelu “is continuous with and greater than the spirits around us. Their dependence on the Holy Spirit for protection from evil forces has liberated us to share with others our freedom from fear, a very enticing proposition in the African context, as well as in the rest of the world”.³⁴

The experience of the Holy Spirit at work through his gifts of healing, exorcising and prophesying gives these churches a self-authenticating key in a hermeneutical process, leading them from their role as healing and coping communities to their becoming effective anti-segregation and liberating forces – in short, churches that are interested not only in daily misfortunes, illness, witchcraft, poverty, and bad luck but also in concrete social problems.³⁵ Churches which emphasise ecstatic possession by the spirit [and always the Holy Spirit], which foster prophecy and spiritual healing and exorcism have been seen as continuations of African belief and practice. Yet these very features, which are taken as being most African, are in reality the most Christian aspect of these churches. They spring directly from increasingly strong tendencies in world Christianity in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They spring in fact either from anti-establishment Christian Pentecostalism, as it developed in Europe and North America, or from evangelical tendencies within the major mission churches themselves. Few independent church leaders have claimed to be continuing African traditions³⁶.

Healing Songs in St John Apostolic Faith Mission

Although the AICs may not all be articulate in written theology, Ositelu argues that “they express faith in their liturgy, worship and structures. Their services are alive with warm expressions of joy as they clap and dance in rhythm with the new spiritual and indigenous songs. Needless to say, the people come because they feel at home”.³⁷

The words of hymns like “*seteng sediba sa madi aletereng ya tefello*” which literally means that there is a “well of blood on Golgotha” is rich in symbolic meaning. An exegesis of the hymn text suggests that the well of blood was an altar of atonement which signified Jesus’ sacrificial death. The well of blood was medicine that gave power to life. Thus, the blood of Jesus was metaphorically a healing medicine that was symbolised by the blessed water members drank. While this hymn was sung, the sanctuary was transformed to represent a well that metaphorically represented the pool of healing where Jesus cured a man who had been an invalid for many years. The pool, which was called Bethesda in the New Testament book John 3, signified that persons who wanted to be healed would have the opportunity to drink blessed water and be prayed for during the service.³⁸

³³ Pfeiffer, *Commodity Fetishism and the Holy Spirit*, 260.

³⁴ Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches*, 232.

³⁵ Anderson, Allan. *Zion and Pentecost: the spirituality and experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic churches in South Africa*. Vol. 6. Unisa Press, 2000.

³⁶ Siegel, Brian. “Neo-Pentecostalism in Black Africa.” 2013:23.

³⁷ Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches*, 62.

³⁸ Paris, Peter J. *Religion and Poverty: Pan-African Perspectives*. Duke University Press, 2009:48.

According to Modiko it is during singing that people receive their healing even before they are touched or prayed for. The general view is that the singers and dancers give the healer more power and support the healer in casting out evil spirits. Dancing and music-making have power to drive away demons. "The spirits in a plagued person are lured into putting in an appearance by means of song and dancing" and in accompaniment to "the rhythm of the hypnotic background singing" the 'demon' is exorcised through the laying-on of hands and by prayer.³⁹ Wouters adds that "performing sacred church songs is, in effect, praying and it calls down the Holy Spirit". Participation is therefore believed to generate healing. When an individual is allowed to dance in the middle of the circle, the Holy Spirit's power is focused on her/him allowing her/him to obtain even more healing power or life-force. Dancing in the middle of this sacred circle is therefore understandably a privileged healing experience.⁴⁰

The ultimate expression of this new life and renewed identity is the personal song of the sufferer: during the therapy the suffering individual moves from a passive state (receiving songs from others) to an active and powerful one, during which he or she composes and sings a song that instructs others in the community. The ritual of performing this personalised song marks the transformation of the individual back into the community in a restored condition⁴¹. At the end the sick person receives healing even before the ministers pray for him or her. When the minister finally gets an opportunity to pray, it is in the form of confirmation and affirmation that indeed the sick person has already been healed and delivered.

Healing and Medicine in St John Apostolic Faith Mission

Western medicine and antibiotics have been used at a cheaper price to alleviate the sickness and suffering of the black poor masses in Africa. The qualified medical doctors, sisters, nurses and medical assistants have traditionally been whites who ministered among the black Africans. Although these Western-trained professionals have been helpful to the sick, for Africans, there has not been enough healing because Africans have always believed in African spiritual healing.⁴² There are also sicknesses and ailments for which the western medicine can provide wisdom in order for healing to take place. Healing is mostly limited to the kinds of sicknesses that are identified through scientific investigations. The reliance on scientific causes of ill-health, Ahiabu professes, "...narrows scientific systems of healing to measures that aim at restoring only scientifically proven causes of ill-health situations". These measures include scientific diagnoses of the cause of sickness, dispensation of biomedicine proven to be efficacious in curing a specific ailment and other forms of treatments such taking rest; doing exercise and regulating one's diet.⁴³

Religion and medicine have had a long relationship especially among the AICs. In modern times, the two are often at odds, with some believing more in faith than in science and others taking the opposite view. In traditional societies and also in AICs, religion and medicine are often fused, with the religious leader or the Bishop or Priest also being the

³⁹ Modiko, *The Concept of Healing Power*, 46.

⁴⁰ Wouters, *An Anthropological Study of Healing Practices*, 149.

⁴¹ Van den Bosch-Heij, Deborah. *Spirit and Healing in Africa*, 2013.

⁴² Mashabela, James Kenokeno. "Healing in a Cultural Context: The Role of Healing as a Defining Character in the Growth and Popular Faith of the Zion Christian Church." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 43, 2017 no. 2:1-14.

⁴³ Ahiabu, Yohanes Kwasi. "Healing and Deliverance in Church Growth: The Case of the Global Evangelical Church, Ghana from 1991-2011." PhD diss., University of Ghana, 2013:27.

medicine man who knows the secrets of healing. While Christians, especially in Evangelical and Charismatic / Pentecostal churches, have faith in the healing power of prayer and depict Jesus as a healer as well, certain groups place a greater emphasis on faith than medicine⁴⁴. St Johns according to Ositelu “does not condemn the scientific medical treatments or the use of curative medicines”.⁴⁵

The Impact of Divine Healing on Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission

As stated in the first section, indeed the greatest attraction to the AICS lies in their ability to integrate African religious belief and the Christian faith. AICs are appreciative of the fact that salvation is not complete if it fails to address their concrete, daily problems such as healing, driving away troublesome spirits and protecting individuals against evil forces through charms, the AICs openly invite members and others to bring their fears and anxieties about witchcraft, bad luck, illness, unemployment and other misfortunes to the Christian community so that they may be given help.⁴⁶

One of the reasons for the growth of AICs in Africa is to respond to the challenge of the absence of spiritual healing in the mission churches. Many members from the mission churches are drawn to these churches and ministries to seek healing. At the same time some mission churches are accommodating the challenges and have included healing ministry in their services. Charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality is also found in some mission-initiated churches in Africa because it resonates with African spirituality.⁴⁷ A major reason for the proliferation of AICs, specifically the Spirit-type AICs, is their ability to address traditional African needs, of which the emphasis is on the deliverance from illness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, evil spirits and sorcery. Unlike mission churches traditional African religions are primarily concerned with rituals of healing and protection. The preoccupation of traditional African religions is with health and the assistance most eagerly sought from early missionaries in Africa was treatment of the sick.⁴⁸

Therefore divine healing has made AICs to be the fastest-growing Christian body in Africa today. The reasons given for the growth are that these churches’ goal was to bring Africans to Christ via media that are understandable to Africans and more relevant messages that meet the needs of the Africans. Unlike the older churches the independent churches are not growing biologically. Hence they have extensive outreach through healing ministries.⁴⁹ St John claims a membership of great number of people across Africa and its prestige is on the increase because of its healing activities. However, the church also experienced certain schisms at later stages and changed its name several times. In spite of these changes it has been a religious force really to be reckoned with.

Healing is very important in the everyday lives of African people. South African people in Soweto consider the ‘healing abilities’ of the church leaders an important factor when they join a church in South Africa. A very similar situation exists in other countries. Most of the churches in Africa have healing sessions, not only during the service, but also on

⁴⁴ Modiko, *The Concept of Healing Power*, 6.

⁴⁵ Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches*, 192.

⁴⁶ Mwakabana, Hance AO, ed. *Crises of Life in African Religion and Christianity*. Lutheran World Federation, 2002.

⁴⁷ Modiko, *The Concept of Healing Power*, 11.

⁴⁸ Wouters, *An Anthropological Study of Healing Practices*, 233

⁴⁹ Cornelius A Olowola, “An Introduction to Independent African Churches.” *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 3, 1984, no. 2:21-49.

many other occasions.⁵⁰ The Spirit-type AICs' prominent promise of healing seemed to have been a definitive attraction to numerous members from various religious backgrounds. Hence, healing practices are typically perceived to be the main reason for the tremendous membership growth rate of Spirit-type AICs.

That Christianity is growing more quickly in Africa than anywhere else is due particularly to the AICs and their relatives, the indigenous Pentecostal churches in many parts of the world. The most serious phenomenon of Christianity in modern Africa is the growth of independent churches which are broken off from mission Churches and from one another. However, there are some churches which have been established by Africans without any trace of breakaway from a mission Church but through the inspiration and call of God.⁵¹

The 2001 Census (to date the last census to include data in religion) places the membership of Zionist/Apostolic/Ethiopian Churches at 31.8% of the population compared to 26.6% in 1996 (Statistics South Africa 2004). Assuming the same growth rate of nearly 20% for the period from 2001 to 2016 their share would be at over 54% by now. Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches stood at 5.9% in 2001, but have since grown very dynamically.⁵² It can hence be safely assumed that the joint share of the population Zionist/Apostolic/Ethiopian Churches and Charismatic Churches is at well over 50%. Particularly the Zionist/Apostolic/ Ethiopian Churches are often described as churches of 'the poorest of the poor'.⁵³ It has generally been argued that the incorporation and popularisation of healing in AICs has contributed to this rapid growth.⁵⁴ In addition, the growth of AICs is attributed to several factors, with the factor of healing, and vibrant singing and dancing, which are uniquely African, as the foremost leading factors.⁵⁵

Conclusion

This article looked at the practice of divine healing in Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission and its impact on the growth of the church, through a missiological lens. The article has discussed the practice of divine healing in the African Independent Churches in general as a point of departure. The practice of divine healing in Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission has been explored by looking at the role of the Holy Spirit, healing symbols and healing songs. The article also looked at the relationship between divine healing and western medicine. The conclusion here is that divine healing has had a huge impact on the growth of Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission.

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⁵⁰ Kgatla, *Healing in Herero Culture*, 2.

⁵¹ Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches*, 32.

⁵² Schlemmer, *Under the Radar*, 48

⁵³ Öhlmann, *African Initiated Churches*, 10.

⁵⁴ Munthali et al., *Seeking Biomedical and Traditional Treatment*, 140.

⁵⁵ Togarasei et al., *The Faith Sector And HIV/Aids in Botswana*, 14.

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